



Running a Karate Club

A Good Practise Guide

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Forward

Over the many years I have experienced different styles of running a karate club.

Some I have trained in others I have visited and some I have taught in.

This article covers my point of view to the good practices and pitfalls of running a successful club.

First we need to establish whether you are a single club teaching your own thing or part of a structured association teaching a hand me down style syllabus. I will mention both as from my experience one mould don't fit all!

Thinking about opening your own club read on

It's not every person's goal to teach karate and it's my view that you shouldn't be made to do so if your heart isn't in it. But as a brown belt and junior Dan grade you should be given the experience of instructing/ coaching. As a practitioner of karate you need to put your self forward as willing to coach. I spent many years teaching just the beginners and often thought I was being punished! Being a young black belt I wanted to be teaching the 'good stuff'. Looking back I now see that teaching the beginners was laying the foundations of being a good all round instructor.

Adult beginners and children are eager to learn and offer instructors a clean slate to work from. It's like looking in the mirror as they will become a reflection of yourself; yes all your good point and bad ones!

By becoming an apprentice to a senior instructor you can learn the ropes without too much pressure and responsibility. Look at it as a probationary period to see if teaching is your thing. If you feel set to start your own club then take a deep breath before you branch out you have a lot more to consider.

Running a club these days requires basic credentials. Insurance, both personal and group. We live in times of civil litigation and a culture of suing. Accidents claims, disability laws, sex discrimination you name it is here. What was only an issue for companies has spilled over into the sports arena and you need to be prepared and knowledgeable if you want to open a club. Do your home work first there are many insurance companies ready to take your money and will offer you what you want. Read the small print and understand the difference between personal liability and group insurance.

Safety in the Dojo

As an instructor it's your responsibility to make sure the training area is safe for students. Make sure you have all hazards cleared away or marked off. Ensure all fire exits are identified and are able to be opened. Nominate an area to meet in case you have to evacuate and take a register of students attending the session. This may all seem like common sense especially if you work in corporate business but often we are in karate mode. Dedicated sports centres will have their own procedures so find out what the drills are and make your self known to the nominated trained first aider.

If you train in an isolated hall then you must make sure that it has the proper safety features. Unblocked fire escapes, first aid kit and fitted fire alarms. I have trained in many halls that had none of these I would hope these days that those who lease have abided by the duty of care they are under obligation to provide.

Nominate someone besides yourself to act as second in command and task them to check for hazards before each class starts. I remember spending hours sweeping the dojo floors for splinters!

I mention these basic points because if the worst happens and someone gets hurt the finger may point at you so do all you can to make the dojo environment safe for training.

Personal liability

Anyone practicing a martial art needs personal cover. You may see this in a license or certificate of liability. Basically this means two things. If you are injured training (under proper guidance) then you could make a claim for your injury. Understand the small print because what you are actually cover for will differ greatly.

Point two, is cover for cases when you injure someone else (again under controlled circumstances) and they make a claim against you. You may not have done anything wrong and their injury may have been with your consent (that's contact sports for you! But another topic) but they could claim against you thousands.

Hopefully you can see the issues facing you when you run a club. Technically you lay hands and have responsibility for many students and each one could in theory make a claim against you based on your supervision, teaching or lack of coaching whilst in your club.

The lesson here is understood what liability means to you, your club and those you teach.

Group/ Club insurance

This is sometimes overlooked and in the old days it really wasn't an issue but these days it is. In a nutshell, if you teach others in a public building then you are liable to what happens whilst in the premises.

If any of their equipment is used and damaged its down to you. In my experience they don't tell you that. Read the small print, you may pay them rent but this often doesn't cover what happens once inside.

Sports centers are asking for certificates and insurance policies to be shown before allowing you in to teach. Create a portfolio of your qualifications including insurance and first aid certificates and not forgetting your upto date CRB (Criminal Record certificate). Also have a copy of the CRB certificates for those who assist you in teaching whether they are paid or coach on a voluntary basis.

Many associations or governing bodies will provide a single point of contact for you to get and submit your insurances and CRB forms through. If they cant help your local police station can give you the CRB forms (it costs about £25) and for indemnity insurance google 'Perkins & Slade' they have been supplying martial artists with insurance for many years. Please note there are two types of CRB checks , standard which tells you if someone has been convicted of a criminal offence or enhanced which will tell you if someone has been investigated for a criminal offence. 60% of sex/violent offenders are not convicted.

My final point on this is ask the questions make sure you are covered and don't fall into the trap of compliancy.

First Aid

Whether you are opening a stamp club or karate club you need to have an awareness of first aid or how to find it in an emergency. You are in charge its your responsibility to act and failure to do so can cause you problems should a civil claim be made against you. My advice is this, get yourself on a basic first aid course and display the certificate in your club.

People especially parents need to know that you are responsible and qualified. Most local St Johns ambulance centers will do courses and there not that expensive. The course will cover life saving (ABC) techniques and response to minor injuries.

We all know martial arts is practiced in a safe environment but don't be complacent accidents do happen. I have witnessed and been victim to several injuries over the years which have required immediate first aid. Looking back especially when being knocked out cold in a competition I was thankful that someone was trained to place me in the recovery position and make sure I didn't choke on my tongue or stop breathing.

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?

You must have seen someone take a punch on the nose and the blood pours, what do you do??(Pinch the nose you say, but do you put the head forward or backwards? What's if the nose is still bleeding after 5 minutes what do you do?).

I think I have made the point **GET TRAINED.**

Safe Practices with Students

People come to train with you to learn not to be tortured, abused or bullied. I say this candidly because I know instructors who have fulfilled all three of the later categories. Have a set of ground rules for all to abide to. Some call it a 'Dojo Kun' others just a set of rules. You don't know for sure why a person comes to train in your dojo, are they coming to build self esteem or learn to defend themselves or are they looking to enhance their skills to hurt people.

My advice is to get every student to sign up to the rules and make sure they understand what is acceptable and what is not.

Set the rules out clearly, it's your reputation at risk. Below are rules which Tom and my clubs abide too, use them as a guide and create your own values.

Its common knowledge that martial arts involve physical contact in one way or another but what is often missed is the words 'reasonable' and 'consented'. These are to very important terms for you to understand as you have a duty to make sure those you teach abide by these terms.

What is he saying you may ask, "we are taught to hit as hard as we can and its not my fault that my partner is too weak or not as skilled as me that's there hard luck". If this is your attitude think again. The law covers this point and all martial artists need to know what's acceptable and in what situation.

The Law of Violence

Lets not beat about the bush, what we learn through martial arts can be deadly if used in the wrong situation and the law will fall hard on you as you should have known better.

I have known many friends and martial artists that have worked the doors and face potentially hostile situations on a weekly basis. They are entitled to defend themselves and those innocent people they look after. But using excessive force because one loses self control for a split second can mean the difference between serious injury or death for somebody and prison for you.

Let's look at these two important points of law in more detail.

Reasonable – “Do you need a hammer to crack a nut”

In some situations yes when the nut is so hard that there is no other way of opening it. Apply this to someone drunk and abusive who you are asking to leave a public area. Do you hit them so hard that it knocks them unconscious and easy to deal with? Or do you apply a neck hold and apply a sleeper rendering them unable to breath, or do you reason with them and charm them out?

There is no set rule and your decision making might happen with only a split second to act.

The understanding here is the law protects those who apply enough force that is reasonable to deal with the situation and that force needs to be proportionate to meet the threat posed.

You ask him to leave and he pulls out a knife what do you do. I would hit him so hard as to knock him unconscious.....why because I can justify that the level of threat was extremely high and potentially life threatening.

You ask him to leave and he starts pushing. You apply a wrist lock and escorted him out.

He is so drunk that he can hardly stand, his language is abusive. You ask him to leave and apply an escort hold and guide him out.

These are three basic examples but I hope you can see the concept behind what is reasonable. I know personally of fellow Dan grades working the doors that have used unreasonable force and charged with assault. They meant to do the right thing but it all went wrong despite years of training.

You can look at this from all ages; the school environment places new risks to our school children. There are so many reports of gang and knife culture, its gone mad. Children we teach are more at risk these days than ever before but let's keep it real. When we teach we need to make sure that students who are bullies or go out to cause trouble are humbled and taught the values of respect and those students who are weak and low in self confidence can stand up for themselves.

Consent – “Is it ok if I knock your teeth out?”

You may laugh but I have trained besides many a psychopath over the years, won't mention any names! Many are good friends who would be more than happy to have their teeth knock out then shake hands and go and have a pint of beer with you. You may be like that yourself, its all for the 'Art' I hear you say, maybe it is but there is a serious point to note.

Like all contact sports there is a level of acceptance that physical force will be used that's the game. But take a football match as an example when after a rough tackle and the ball is out of play one player punches the other in the mouth, acceptable, 'NO' with consent, 'No'.

There is a limit and this is reflected in law. Consent in most situations is accepted but can be breached. Accidents can happen but elements such as recklessness and malice are important factors when the courts are deciding your motives for causing an injury.

Transfer this to you Dojo. We all accept that we are going to be hit and feel strain with a lock or hold, but we don't consent to having bones broken or injuries caused through loss of control and bad temper.

This is why having fundamental ground rules are so important. It reduces the risk of unnecessary injury, prevents civil claims being brought against the instructor and sets moral standards to those you teach.

In law we are allowed to protect ourselves, others and property this is known as common law. It's been round for many years and still stands. You must justify the level of force used.

Child Protection

When I started teaching karate the term 'child protection' didn't exist, or did it? Parents would entrust their children into your care for several hours a week without a thought that any harm would come to them apart from a fat lip or a splinter from the floor.

How times have changed....

I approach this topic as a father, karate instructor and police officer experienced in investigating paedophiles.

If you are running a club you have to understand and practice recommended child protection safeguards.

Parents these days expect it, children deserve it and you have a duty of care.

The world of child abuse is vast and complex, experts say that a child can be abused sexually, physically, by neglect and emotionally.

Whats this got to do with running a club?

You will come into contact with many children over the years and build relationships with them like a second parent in some cases. Like a school teacher you will find that you see developmental and emotional changes in a child which may cause you concern. Its been able to recognise the changes and correctly interpret what you are seeing and know what to do that counts.

Physical abuse

70% of child abuse happens within the family home that is fact. Signs may not be obvious like a bruising on a child face or cigarette burns on the backs of their hands.

I have dealt with many cases where injuries have been on parts of the body covered by clothing and there not necessarily substantial wounds. Often children who are exposed to domestic violence within the home or bullying by a parent(s) or at school will present with injuries that can easily be explained. It's looking for the frequency of these injuries or a disclosure made by a child to you that will cause you to take the action I will recommend at the end of this section.

Neglect

This is a vast area, just because a child doesn't wear labelled clothing or have the latest hair style doesn't mean they are neglected. I have seen children from middle class families that are exposed to neglect by the parents simply not providing adequate supervision. There are cases where parents have gone on holiday and left their teenage children to look after themselves for 2 weeks or not been concerned with a child attending school, this is neglect.

There is of course the classic neglect cases where a child is made to suffer through lack of food, clothing, accommodation and the like.

Sexual

This speaks for itself. But did you know that children are more likely to be sexually abused by someone they love? Hard to believe but its the grooming of children culminating in trust and betrayal that is the basis to child sexual abuse. You may ask why doesn't the child tell someone. Sometimes the child is groomed for sexual abuse from an early age and isn't exposed to pain and therefore doesn't release that the loving person is abusing them.

There is of course the cases of stranger attacks which are traumatic and only as I write this there is a child murder investigation being shown on the news.

Emotional

This area of abuse can be a stand alone abuse and can accompany any of the abuses sections above. This is the mental element that comes with any abuse or bullying. It ranges from mild depressions to suicide. We all have down days but its looking for consistent changes in mood that may raise your concern.

I am not a psycholgist but base the above on years of fist hand experience. Its my aim to make you aware of your obligation to care for children whilst they are with you, as they may find you the only person they can confide in. Knowledge is power but common sense is essential with deciding what to do if a child discloses or you suspect abuse.